Two different questions about ontology

- Do there exist entities of a given sort (universals, numbers, etc.)?
- What sort of claims in a theory commit the theorist to the existence of entities of a certain sort?
  - This is the issue of ontological commitment

Problem of negative existentials

- “Pegasus does not exist” ought to be true.
- Yet if the word ‘Pegasus’ is meaningful, then it seems Pegasus must exist after all.
- Similarly, “universals do not exist,” etc.
- Seems that the very use of the words ‘universals’, ‘Pegasus’, etc. is ontologically commissive.

McX's response

- Pegasus does exist, it's an idea in people's minds.
- This is a bad idea: It is always wrong to confuse an idea with what it is or purports to be an idea of.
- Of course the idea of Pegasus does exist. This is not what we want to deny.

Wyman's response

- Pegasus does subsist, as an unactualized possible entity.
- Pegasus does not exist in the sense that it is not actual.
- Quine thinks that "unactualized possibles" are mysterious and ill-defined.

- Q holds that possibility should be reserved for statements, not entities.
- Wyman's solution won't work for other examples.
  - "The round square cupola on Berkeley College does not exist."
  - Cannot say this is meaningless

Russell's Theory of Descriptions

- The mistake here is to take the meaning of every noun phrase as an entity of some sort.
- E.g., the meaning of "the 42nd President of the US" is the man, Bill Clinton.
- Russell argued against this. The meaning of a definite description understood in the context of the whole sentence, thus:

- “The F is G” means,
  - There is a unique F , and it is G.
- “The F exists” means,
  - There is a unique F, and it is self-identical.

- “The F does not exist” means,
  - It is not the case that the F exists.

Extension to names

- “Pegasus” can be treated as a definite description, something like,
  - “the mythical horse of Bellerophon.”
  - Then Russell’s Theory can be applied.

Solution to the problem of negative existentials

- “Pegasus does not exist” means
- “It is not the case that there is a unique thing that is the mythical horse of Bellerophon and is self-identical.”
  - Though “Bellerophon” needs to be dealt with
  - Use the general term “pegazises.”

Quine's First Law of Ontological Commitment

- Use of a singular term does not commit the speaker to the existence of an entity named by the term.
- "Meaning" and "naming" are not the same thing
  - "Hesperus", "Phosphorus" already show this.

Quine's Second Law of O.C.

- Use of a predicate does not commit one to a universal that it names. (48-9)
  - "My car is red", "There exist red houses."
- Quine seems to hold a pure linguistic nominalism
  - Does not regard the meaning of a general world as an entity of any sort.
  - But he owes us an alternative account of the meaning of predicates and the truth of sentences containing them.

Quine's Third Law of O.C.

- Only quantifiers and variables carry ontological commitment (50).
  - "Some dogs are white" commits one to particular dogs, but not to any universals
  - "Some species of oak are endangered" commits one to universals—species of oak in addition to particular oak trees.
  - "To be is to be the value of a variable."

Quine's Fourth Law

- Acceptance of an ontology is similar to the acceptance of a scientific theory
- Examples:
  - various alternative philosophies of mathematics;
  - physicalism vs. phenomenalism

Q's Fifth Law

- Acceptance of an ontology—an overall theory of what exists—should be based on pragmatic considerations.
  - Needs of science are paramount.

“What is it to be” questions

- What is it to be a bachelor?
  - To be a bachelor is to be an unmarried man
- What is it to be water?
  - To be water is to be the chemical substance H2O.
- What is it to be this particular person (this particular tree, etc.)?
  - ?

Can a particular be “defined?”

- Leibniz thought so:
  - Every particular is “definable” as the unique thing with such-and-such a collection of properties.
- But couldn’t there be two distinct particulars that just happen to have all the same properties?
  - The Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles says “no.”

Black's Paper

- Argues that a suitably precise version of the Identity of Indiscernibles is false.
- Does not carefully distinguish different versions of the principle, however.
- Version (2) is true, but cannot be used to define particularity or identity.

“Thisnesses” and “Suchnesses”

- A “thisness” is the property of being identical to x, where x is some particular.
- Such a property presupposes the notions of particularity and identity.
- We need a version of the Identity of Indiscernibles that is more restrictive.

Qualitative Properties

- A qualitative property is a property that makes no essential reference to a particular.
- This includes some relational properties.
- Qualitative: redness, squareness, largeness, goodness, fatherhood.
- Not qualitative: being father of Sasha Obama.

The Interesting Question

- Can there be two distinct particulars that nevertheless have all the same qualitative properties?
- The example of the iron spheres is supposed to show that the answer is ‘yes.’

Reading

- Read parts I and II of Intro to Part III and
- David Lewis' "Possible Worlds"

The Identity of Qualitative Indiscernibles

- Leibnizians:
- For any x and y, x = y iff x and y have exactly the same qualitative properties.

- Black's case of the iron spheres is meant to be a counterexample to this principle.

A Leibnizian response to Black's example

- The two spheres differ in their spatial locations.
- Isn't the spatial location of each a property of it that the other does not have?
- Yes, but is it a qualitative property of that thing?

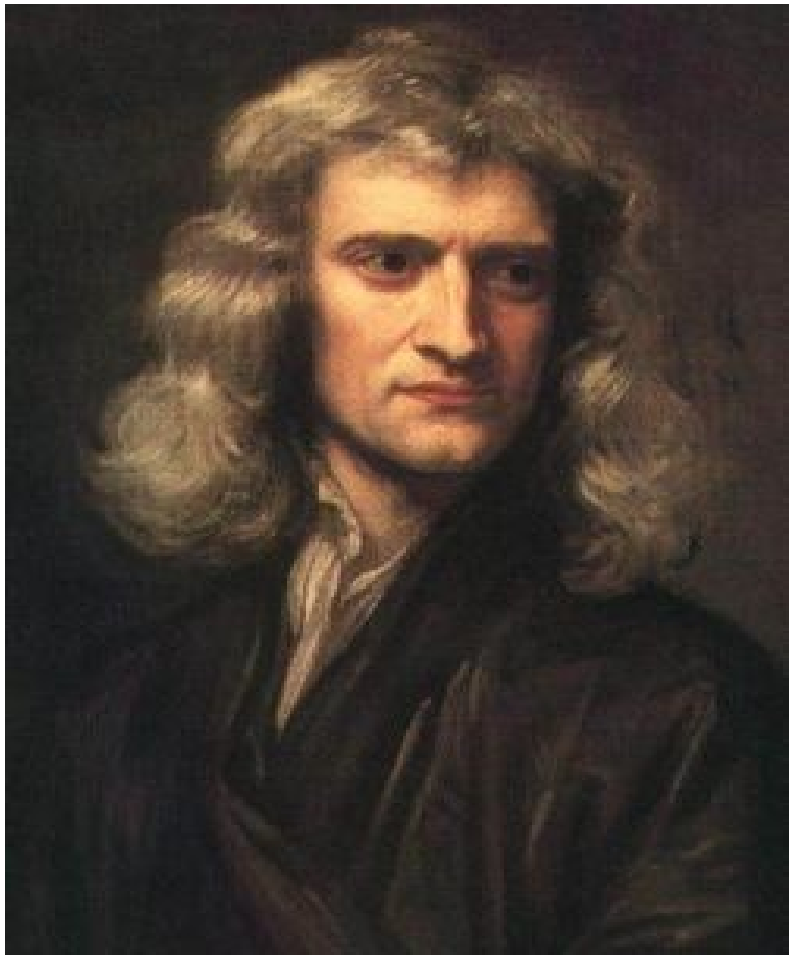
Two Theories of Space

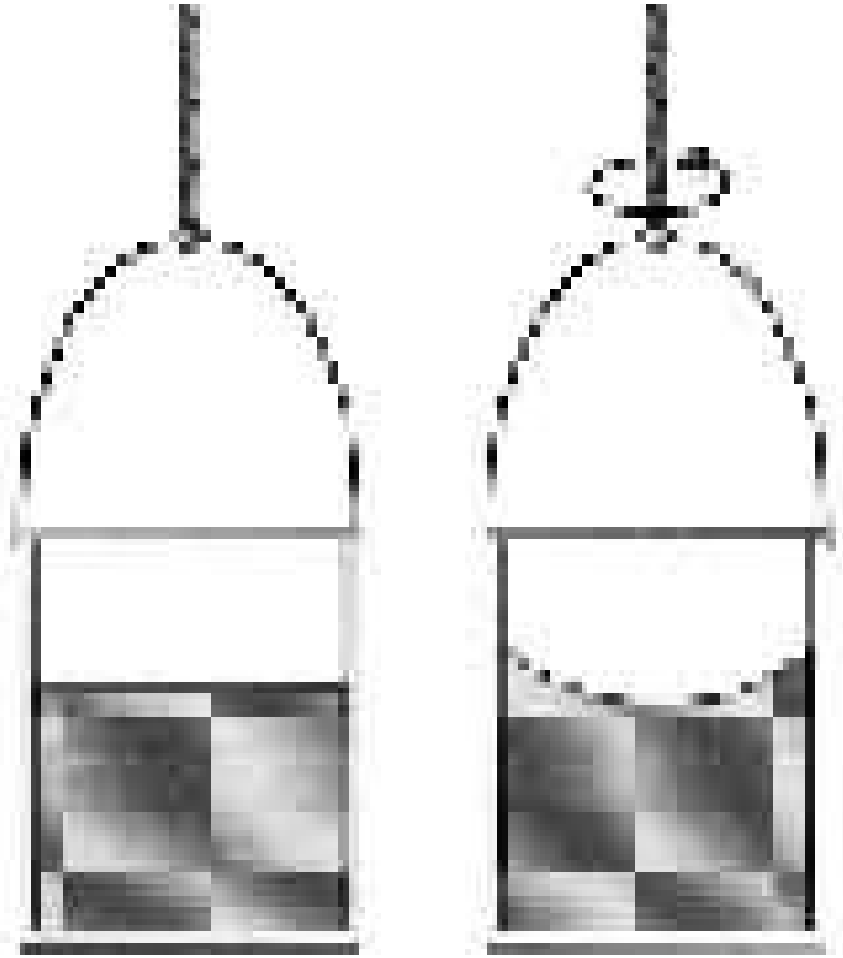
- Absolutism: Space is an entity in its own right, a gigantic particular, with points in it and regions of it being parts of it.
- Relationism: Space is not an entity in its own right, space is just the totality of spatial relations among objects.
  - Reference to a point or region of space must be explained in terms of other objects.

Leibniz-Clarke correspondence

- 5. Those great principles of a sufficient reason, and of the identity of indiscernibles, change the state of metaphysics. That science becomes real and demonstrative by means of these principles; whereas before, it did generally consist in empty words.
- 6. To suppose two things indiscernible, is to suppose the same thing under two names. And therefore to suppose that the universe could have had at first another position of time and place, than that which it actually had; and yet that all the parts of the universe should have had the same situation among themselves, as that which they actually had; such a supposition, I say, is an impossible fiction. (Leibniz's 4th Paper, Alexander 1956, 37)

Newton's Bucket Thought Experiment: An argument for absolute space





Back to Black

- Suppose relationism is true: then the spatial location of sphere x cannot be specified except in terms of relations x bears to other objects.
- Any such relational property will either not be qualitative, or it will not distinguish x from the other sphere.

- If absolutism about space is true, we can say that x is located at point p.
  - But p is a particular, so again this property is not qualitative.
- So: the spatial location of an object is not a qualitative property of it.
  - Reduplication of the sort in Black's example may even be a feature of our own universe.

Criteria of identity for different kinds of things

- For any physical objects x and y:
  x = y iff x and y occupy exactly the same region of space.
- For any sets x and y:
  x = y iff x and y have exactly the same members.
- Such criteria help illuminate what it is to be a thing of a given kind.

Necessity, Possibility, Contingency, Actuality

- Modes of truth:
- Contingent truths:
- The Obamas have two daughters;
  It rarely rains in SoCal; I had oatmeal for breakfast.
- Necessary truths: 2 + 2 = 4; the Indiscernibility of Identicals; Dick Cheney is a human being (?)

- Contingent truths could have been otherwise
- Necessary truths could not.
- These ideas depend on our sense that there are ways that the world might have been, other than the way it actually is.

    = Other possibilities,
    in a sense that's metaphysical not epistemic.

De Re Necessity

- BO has the property of being president contingently.
- BO has the property of being human necessarily.

Possible Worlds

- Our talk of possibilities and necessities stands in need of metaphysical backing.
  - What makes it true that GB might have been commissioner of baseball?
    given that it's not actually true that he is commissioner, and he never was and nver will be.
    - Perhaps: the fact that GB is commissioner in some other possible world

Realism about Possible Worlds

- Analogous to realism about universals:
- Metaphysical backing for our talk about possibility, necessity, and contingency
- Lewis's version:
  - There are other possible worlds
  - They are not mere abstractions, but things like the actual world
  - Rather like other times
  - But not spatio-temporally related to our world
  - Causally isolated from it

Actuality

- ‘Actual’ is an indexical, like ‘here.’
  - When we say ‘the actual world,’ we mean the world we live in
  - When people in other possible worlds say ‘the actual world’ they mean their world.
  - There is nothing metaphysically special about our world (sorry).
    - Just as there is nothing metaphysically special about now (this time) or here (this place).

Counterparts

- So what makes it true that GB might have been commissioner is that he is commissioner in some other pos. world.
- Well, not exactly. Lewis thinks this would violate the Indiscernibility of Identicals.
- It's a counterpart of GB in some other world that "attests" to the fact that GB might have been commissioner.

Are counterparts necessary?

- Don’t they undermine the rationale for possible worlds?
- Why isn’t it consistent to say that GB is not commissioner in the actual world, but he is in another possible world?
- Seems no worse than saying GB was president in 2008, but he is not now.
  - Stay tuned for Lewis’s response.